

The Brahmgyani Martyr Guru Arjan Dev

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GURU Arjan Dev is the central-most figure of the Sikh history and is on all accounts a unique personality such as has no parallel. Coming as he did between Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikh Theocracy, and Guru Govind Singh, the creator of the Khalsa Brotherhood, Guru Arjan Dev combined the prophetic qualities of the one with the dynamic personality of the other. The more you read him the clearer becomes the conviction that Guru Arjan Dev was the very head and heart of Nanak. Were it not for him Sikhism would have run to seed, and it would not have been what it is today: a mighty *pīpal* which has its roots deep in the bowels of Eternity. A worthy son of the worthy father, Guru Ram Das, it was Guru Arjan Dev who first proved in his person that the Guru's son is really the fit person to step into the shoes of his father. Guru Nanak selected Angad in preference to his own sons, but evidently the holy influence of Nanak was as much at work in the lineal line as in the outside world, so that a century of preparation had changed the very spiritual seed. The Guru held the *gaddi* for close upon three decades, and these days were certainly the most successful in expansion and consolidation of the Sikh religion.

Guru Arjan laid the foundation of Tarn Taran city which was to become a raft to carry the drowning souls across the 'ocean of *māyā*.' Most of the temples and tanks that are found at Amritsar or Kartarpur were built in his time. He organised a band of

missionaries who carried the torch of Divine Light to the farthest corners of the Punjab. He introduced the *kār-bhet* system which, if well administered, has all the potentialities of good and expansion. He organised a daily service at Durbar Sahib, Sri Amritsar. Indeed, his hands were always full with many schemes which aimed at dispelling the forces of darkness, and in ushering in Light into the land of the Five Rivers. This was quite in consonance with the prophecy of his grandfather Sri Guru Amar Dev, whose viands he took in both of his hands while yet a child, that Guru Arjan Dev's hands will be always full with matters spiritual.

Manifold as were the Guru's activities in his busy life of about forty years, yet there are three outstanding works connected with him, any one of which, by itself, would be sufficient to make his name immortal; they are: the compilation of the *Adi Granth*, the construction of the Golden Temple at Amritsar, and last but not least, his own sacrifice for the sake of his cause and the country. We will do well to take each separately.

Compilation of the *Adi Granth*

It was a Himalyan task which Sri Guru Arjan Dev took on his shoulders when he tried to compile the *Granth* and yet he carried it through, as he alone could. The *Adi Granth* is by no means the Sikh Bible, but it is the Common-Bible of the *Bharat-warsh*. You will find therein the psalms of Kabir side by side

with the hymns of the Gurus, of Farid and Bhikham, the Mohammedan saints alongside those of Namdev and Ravidas who were pre-eminently Hindus; there is a lyric of the Bengali poet Jaidev, the reputed author of *Gītā Govinda*, and another from Ramanand who was the founder of the Vaishnavite movement in India. Indeed all those who outpoured their heart in their own mother tongue, the Hindustani, and all those who were inspired by the Divine Voice, found a niche in this immortal Temple of the Spirit. Who that reads this Divine Book can fail to be stirred by the deep surging of the Spirit which animates the whole poetry? Every page sparkles with divine refulgence, each line tingles us with rare joy. There is no human chord that is not struck, there is no depth that is not stirred! Words stutter to give an idea of the labour involved and the value of the Herculean task accomplished!

In the pages of the *Guru Granth*, you do feel man come into his own, developed to his full stature of manhood, when man is no longer man but one with the Supreme Self. No longer are elemental forces of Nature the objects of worship, but only the Timeless Spirit Whom we call the *Akal Purakh*. The arid desert of philosophy has been replaced by the mountain-heights of meditation. No longer the cold philosophy of the head but the palpitating warm blood of the heart! Humility, the crown of godliness, has taken the place of bloated egotism! The mother-tongue has displaced the high-stilted Sanskrit. For the first and, perhaps, the last time, you find the whole of India trying to speak a common language, a language understood more or less in all corners of India, and which is the language of the unlettered masses. Herein, is the first concerted attempt to evolve both a common language and a common nationality. In *Guru Granth*, therefore, lies hidden

the seed of India's unity, as also of its salvation.

It is impossible to describe the poetry of the *Guru Granth* except by stating that it is as grand, simple and varied as Nature itself. In its verse, the sunshine laughs, birds sing, the *chatrik* thrists, the *koel* warbles plaintive notes, rivers dance, snow sparkles; *Basant*, the king of seasons, comes in gala dress; mountains give forth their sonorous echoes; the tide of human heart ebbs and flows; and man, the estranged-bride, is once more in the arms of Beloved: the Supreme Spouse! All the gold of Indian daybreak is there! All the perfume of the Indian sandalwoods is there! All the pellucid purity of Indian pearls is there! Such is the *Sikh Granth*, the very quintessence of all essence Divine!

Each Bible is necessarily a symbol, an hieroglyph of the underlying spirit. But there are Bibles and Bibles, some that lift the veil however inadequately, others that heap curtains on curtains mystifying the mystery itself, and making confusion worse confounded. In the *Guru Granth Sahib*, however, there is the first genuine attempt to completely take off the veil from the Spirit. Herein, at last, is the Isis completely unveiled! Herein, the goddess of Saraswati comes to you in her stark nudity! Herein, the goddess Vesta meets the virgins and the matrons alike, with equal hospitality!

Above all, *Guru Granth Sahib* is the only Bible which gives you complete information about that eerie-possession, the *Nām*, which is the key to the Kingdom of Heaven, and but for which all poetry is verbiage and all philosophy illusory. The Gospel of St. John holds out the hint about the Word which was in the beginning and which came not only from God but is God: but it leaves you there to exercise your ingenuity as to how to ferret it out. The

Gītās and *Gitanjalis* do not even refer to it. In the *Guru Granth Sāhib*, the novice, i.e., the Sikh is directly face to face with this grand Reality, and having discovered It first, he slowly builds the temple of the Spirit, laying long perpendicular pillars which having their basis in *Nām*, rear the Dome into the infinite blue! The Sikh begins with this weird Bed-rock first. He is, therefore, firm-footed. Others build only on a foundation of sand. It is this which makes all the difference between success and failure. *Guru Granth Sahib* is unique as it deals not so much with the metaphysical *ātman*, as with its practical correlate: the *Nām*. While the metaphysician obtains at best a side long glance of Reality, the Sikh mystic experiences this dazzling Reality first hand!

Guru Arjan Dev's contribution to this *Granth* is by far the greatest, and it would be no exaggeration to state that his hymns are equal to or greater than the hymns of all other *bhagatās* combined. From this fact alone the towering personality of the fifth Guru will be obvious, but you have only to read any one of his psalms to gauge the real inwardness of his genius. In particular, his *Sukhmani* is the choicest of all his spiritual gems, and it is veritably the Koh-i-Noor of the Spirit! Herein you find simplicity turned sublime, art engulfed by artlessness, love maturing into fecundity! This *Sukhmani* stands in the same relation to other *Gītās* as the Himalyas to their foothills, the Sivaliks. But each psalm of the fifth Guru is a little *Sukhmani* in itself. The following is typical of his other hymns, and shows the change which comes over the Sikhs when he is illumined by the Ghostly-Light of the Name:

My mind is illumined;

The egg of ignorance hath burst,

The captive soul is freed,

The fog of darkness hath dispersed,

No more endless cycle of life and death,
No more fretting and fuming

In steaming cauldron of Time, which cooled
As soon as the Guru showered the *Nām*-
blessing.

The load of *Karma* is removed off my breast,
And I soar like a bird, free on its wing;

No more the irksome restraint of the Law,
When the Lord himself dost the christening.

From the sea of becoming I have reached
The shore of being and of rest,

I reached this haven when I was of the Guru,
And was, in turn, by the Guru blest,

Truth is now my resting-ground,

Truth is my rock and my dwelling,

Truth is my capital and stock-in-trade,

Saith Nanak, yea, I have found my Home.

Apart from the Guru's compositions, what strikes me as startling evidence of his genius is the manner of the arrangement of the *Adi Granth*. The hymns there are not like the unstrung beads, nor are they loosely strung: on the other hand, there is an organic arrangement, so that not even one hymn can be displaced or removed. There is the deepest significance in the fact that the Guru arranged the hymns in the order of *rāgas* or musical scales, for is not the universe itself planned on the self-same lines? Consider the music of the spheres which spins out creation and makes layer after layer of the world-stuff much as the architect lays brick on brick. This is why the Celestial City of the *Adi Granth* is also laid on the Cosmic Style. In this City-Celestial the main thoroughfares are the *rāgās* which are like so many milky ways, resplendent with the diamond-dust of the Spirit; the side-alleys or *Mahallās* are the Gurus or other *bhagatās*, and groups of psalms are palaces or *ghars*, while each hymn is like a little room or window of the soul. Such is the architecture of this *Granth*—a veritable image of the Cosmos,

Construction of the Golden Temple, Amritsar

While the depth and the beauty of the *Adi Granth* must necessarily be reserved for the initiates, Guru Arjan Dev left us an image of his Divine mind in that dream of dreams, which is concentrated for all time at Amritsar. This temple was at first commenced by Guru Ram Das, but the subsequent modelling and finish is due entirely to the Fifth Guru. Those who look on merely the alabaster and the gold miss the inner spirit which pervades the whole building and but for which it would be another colourless Durgiana. The whole place is literally crammed with Divine influence, and no one who enters the sacred precincts of the Durbar Sahib can fail to be stirred by that immanent Light which is congealed, as it were, to form the bedrock of this Temple. Guru Arjan Dev sanctified the building by his life-giving *mantrās* which he sang in accompaniment with *tambourā*. His divine voice filled and overflowed the dome, until it was absorbed and re-absorbed by the thirsty lake outside, which has, therefore, become literally an "Ocean of Immortality". That divine voice still lingers in the folds and the curves of its sky-kissing cupola, and its echo still awakens extinguished souls. It is this Divine influence which took the writer once by surprise, when he was listening to the pearls of sacred choir from within, and which has ever since been his life companion and his most cherished possession. It was a moonlit night and the image of the moon was clearly reflected in the blue sheet of water. My eyes wandered from the golden dome to that far-off queen of the heavens, and back again, when all of a sudden, the bonds of my imprisoned soul were let loose, and lo, I was like a nymph ardently circling round the golden dome, like an enchanted seraphim. It was twenty five years back that I had this salutary experience, but I know that heaven

has been steadily at work in the hidden depths of soul, until the entire mass was leavened. I also remember vividly how on that eventful night, I felt. I did feel how the moon itself tarried in its lawful course to pay obeisance to its Guru, for, is He not eternally enshrined in the Music which rings from morn to eve, yea, to all eternity, under that heavenly dome?

We must consider at some length the idea or the design which underlies the whole building, and which makes it verily an image of the Living Reality. Consider first its lay-out and approach: note how the Temple opens on all the four sides: the four cardinal points are its doors the heaven itself is its invisible dome. This is a temple meant not for any particular sect or denomination, but for one and all, as much for the East as for the West. Before you approach the Temple, you must descend a flight of steps. Have you marked this startling feature? If not, go to the Golden Temple and watch the construction; this is an abiding symbol of the Sikh humility. Then scan practically the limitless stretch of the *lapis lazuli* water. Isolated by this stretch of the blue, the Temple remains immune from all worldly trouble, and the dust and dirt of the outside world cannot pollute the pearly surface of the Golden Temple. The holy waters wash its walls which remain firm in a sea of *māyā*. Mark the contrast between this tempestuous seal on the one hand, and the Firm Throne of the *Akal Purakh* which is poised in the aforesaid lake, like one big lotus. I say mark this carefully, for if you have mastered the underlying idea, this eternal contact between *māyā* and *Purshā*, and the connecting bridge of *Nām*, then alone you can realise the ground-plan devised by that supreme architect who fashioned the Golden Temple on earth, on the self-same lines on which the heavens and the Cosmos itself are built. He who looks deep into this idea, will

I have seen all temples, here, there, and every
where,
But this Temple, ah, none is like unto thee;
The Creator Himself laid the design,
This is why thou art a paragon of Beauty.

But the soul of the Golden Temple is deeper and still more beautiful: it is unending, ravishing Music from the *Adi Granth*. The *Adi Granth* and the Golden Temple are not two but indissolubly one, even as are the body and soul. The Golden Temple is the tabernacle where the eternal *Nām* resides. How we wish we could see through the outer covering into that Living Presence of which the gold and the alabaster are but symbols. The Golden Temple was once razed to the ground and rebuilt. Why? Did not the Supreme Architect know of the fate that was to befall it once? Yes, He knew it well enough but permitted this sacrilege at the hands of the iconoclasts so that the ghastly experience may remain as an eternal reminder to the worshippers that the Soul of the Golden Temple is not its brick and mortar, but that impalpable, yet thoroughly real *Nām*, of which alone we are the worshippers. We can afford to be deprived temporarily of the outward tabernacle, but woe befall the day when the Sikhs are weaned from their bosom companion, the *Nām*. The holy choristers inside the Temple always remind us about that priceless possession, even as the milk-white slabs outside remind us of the virtues of purity.

This brings us to the still more eventful part of the Guru's life. From the *Adi Granth* to the Golden Temple is a slow but arduous journey. He who had laid these two milestones on the march to life had already accomplished his life's task. But the crown of martyrdom was also reserved for this angelic soul, and when the Supreme One offers it to His servants, it must be gladly worn. The enemies of the Guru were already on the look-out. They could not patiently feel the ground sinking under their feet. Sikhism, a plant of yesterday, had evidently struck root, nay more, it had begun to flourish. The *Adi Granth* and the Golden Temple were visible signs of the vigour of this creed. Hundreds of thousands of men ran to the feet of the Guru to be initiated into this new Fold. They felt that the Sikh was an entirely new creation, something altogether changed. They saw with their own eyes sparrows changed into hawks, paupers become millionaires in spirit. Evidently, the ferment was at work. The fuse was working slowly but surely, and very soon the castle of ignorance was doomed to destruction. News was carried to the Emperor of this silent revolution in the land of the five rivers. Monarchs are always suspicious of anything new and startling. With an Akbar or Babar, it would have been different, for the blue blood still coursed in their veins, but Jehangir was a very sordid specimen of humanity. He had sold himself to his beautiful wife, in a fit of passion which clung to him like a shadow all his life. In this fitful frenzy, he was fanned by wine and other idle engagements which kept him tied like a prisoner in the hands of his wife and her relatives. In fact, Jehangir is the sorriest figure in all Mughal history. All other Mughals were great in one way or the other; Akbar was an empire-builder and peacemaker; Shah Jehan made

that wonderful Taj which is love crystallised into marble so that all may wonder and see; Babar was an adventurer and a founder, and even Aurangzeb had his redeeming feature for he used to earn his pittance by copying and selling the *Qoran*; but what was there to the credit of this voluptuary prince who sold the birth-right of governance in a fit of passion, and who passed all his life a hen-pecked husband? We can well understand the mentality of a worldly king such as this, as to why he inserted the following lines in his Autobiography, and why Akbar wanted to oust him in favour of Khusro:

"On the banks of river Beas there stands a village Govindwal. Here lived a Hindu master, Arjan. He had quite a number of Hindu simpletons, as also several Mohammedan rustics, as his disciples. There he proclaimed his leadership. He was hailed on all sides as a Guru, and worshippers from all parts of the country rallied round him and paid homage to him. This shop of gurudom had continued for the last three or four generations. I was contemplating since long either to end this trade or to convert the Guru into Islam. In the meantime Khusro was passing that way, crossing the river near Govindwal. The idiot approached the Guru and laid before him his case imploring for help. The Guru put the saffron mark (*tilak*) on the forehead of Khusroo in token of his blessing. When I heard all this I ordered the Guru to be brought before me. I conferred all his belongings and children to Murtza Khan, forfeited this property and ordered that he should be tortured to death."*

The details of torture are too well known to need specific mention. Suffice it to say that the Guru was seated on a red-hot plate of iron, and burning sand was poured over his body. The Guru was firm like the Himalayas, and his face was throughout flushed with Divine glory. At about the eleventh hour, Saint Mian Mir who was a bosom friend of the Guru learnt of this ghastly tragedy. He ran to the feet of the Master and wished to see the Emperor personally, for as he said: "Master, I cannot bear to witness this torture." The Guru loved Mian Mir as the father loves his child, and asked him to look up, when lo!

*Khazan Singh, wrote in an unpublished document.

the hosts of Heaven were clustered on his head, and each angel was vying with the other, bending from his throne to departing soul, and welcoming the Guru into everlasting habitation.

Tears trickled down the cheeks of aged Mian Mir and thus departed the holiest of holies: Guru Arjan Dev, a martyr to the cause which he espoused all his life. The Guru died when he was still in the prime of his life for he was only forty-three when he shuffled off the mortal coil. Thus was fulfilled the prophecy of the first Guru and the founder:

If thou wishest to play the game of love,
Place thou, then, thy head on thy palm,
and step forth into this lane.
Yea, if thou wantest to tread this path
Fear not to sacrifice thy head.

All hail to Guru Arjan Dev, the Prince of Martyrs, the Heart and soul of Sikhism.

Conclusion

The Guru is not dead, but is here, there, and everywhere. Indeed, as long as the *Adi Granth* is there to kindle the Divine Flame in the heart of its worshippers and devotees, so long Guru Arjan Dev is in our midst. In that deathless form is enshrined the Living Spirit of our Lord. Guru Arjan Dev is a towering personality, head and shoulders above all others. Indeed, he was a spiritual prodigy. While yet a boy, he carried an old head on young shoulders, and with the march of time, his reputation for wisdom remained steadily on the increase. It was he who realised for the first time, and tried to give form to the golden idea of India's spiritual unity and solidity. Although to-day we are cut into many pigeonholes by communal partitions

and although we are more sundered than ever before, yet it will not be long before we run back to the banner which the great Guru Arjan Dev hoisted four centuries ago. The Gurus were as much our political saviours as our spiritual Masters. But they knew that Rome was not built in a day, nor can a nation be evolved in the twinkling of an eye. They, therefore, began with constructive work at first. The *Adi Granth* is the spiritual cement whereby they intended to knit the heterogeneous mass of India. The *Adi Granth* is our All India Bible. The language used is the All India Hindustani, and not merely Panjabi. You find therein the principle of give and take, of compromise, already at work. The psalms compiled therein come in from all corners of India. The saints when they sang these hymns, purposely used such expressions as may be understood in all parts of India, so that the whole of India may thrill together, may weep together, may laugh together. But we are fallen on hard times once more; we talk in our separate gibberish, we cherish separate idioms, we build separate Towers of Babel. If we are really in dead earnest about our freedom, we must begin where the Gurus left us; we must cherish the *Gurū Granth* as our Common Bible; we must cherish the Golden Temple as our common centre of communion; indeed, we must become true disciples of the Gurus. That way lies our freedom and salvation; otherwise we wander in wilderness of political chaos, or sink in the morass of communal rivalry.

The Sikh culture aims at reconciliation of the East and the West. The Sikh is intended to bridge the yawning chasm between the Hindus and the Mohammadans. Sikhism is new life; it is awakening in the *Nām*. We can no more cut ourselves off from the Light than we can afford to cut ourselves off from air, by raising wooden partitions of caste, creed and colour. Our salvation lies in breathing the Sikh air more freely, sinking our mutual differences in common solvent of Sikhism, and following the indigenous god-Gurus who laid down their lives at the common altar of Mother India. Five centuries back Nanak pointed the way, and his beckoning finger is still outstretched like a radiant beam of light, out of those nimbus clouds which begird the impregnable heights of the Kailash with a ring of gold. I repeat: the Guru is still in our midst, only He is uplifted on a throne of eternal snow and silver, if only we have the eye to see. Let us work as He did. Guru Arjan walked in the footsteps of His Master and became a Guru and Martyr. It is up to us to follow in His footsteps and to be transfigured likewise—for Sikhism is but another name for the alchemy of soul.

If thou wishest to play the game of love,
Place thy bead on thy palm and step into
this lane,

If thou wantest to tread this path
Fear not to sacrifice thy head.

All hail to brahmgyani martyr, Sri Guru
Arjan Dev.